

The Egoist Encyclopedia

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by Wolfi Landstreicher

Writing an encyclopedia is an ambitious project, arguably expressing more egotism than egoism. But I would never deny being ambitious (and perhaps a bit arrogant as well). Nonetheless, I feel it is necessary to explain what I mean by “encyclopedia”. In the 18th century in France, Diderot, along with his friend and occasional intellectual sparring partner D’Alembert, edited one of the most famous encyclopedias of all time. In this work, he explains that this word is made up of the Greek preposition meaning “in” and two Greek words meaning “circle” and “knowledge” (“paedia” more accurately means learning rather than mere factual knowledge, but more on that later). Diderot concluded from this that the word meant “chain of knowledge” and involved gathering together knowledge from around the globe. But I look at this etymology with a bit more whimsy. In ancient Greece (and in other parts of the Mediterranean up to the late Middle Ages), learning and philosophical discourse often took place in gardens, parks or around the streets of cities where there was still only foot traffic while the students and teachers walked around in circles. Sometimes in my more utopian reveries, I imagine a world where learning, discussion and debate can happen in a similar fashion, on long, aimless walks in an environment without the noise and threat of large machines to disturb the flow of ideas, projects and dreams. These strolls, after the manner of the Peripatetics and the Stoics, would be the “circles of learning” that encyclopedias would record. Well, Portland is a modern city. The traffic, the noise, the lack of adequate space limits the possibility for pursuing discussions of more than two or three people in this manner, and even these small discussions are usually burdened with the need to watch for the potentially deadly traffic. So such encyclopedic endeavors mostly exist only in a metaphorical sense.

Nonetheless, if I gather most of my knowledge from books, it is the discussions I have in my circles of friends and acquaintance, or among strangers I encounter in my circumambulations around this town and around the world, that provide me with the capacity for critical thinking that turns this knowledge from mere facts to real learning. Thus, the “circle of learning” remains the source for my ideas, thoughts and reveries.

In this sense, Diderot is right to claim that one individual could not write an encyclopedia. The process of learning, of developing the capacity to think critically and confront the realities and the ideas one encounters with discernment and shrewdness, always involves lively interactions with others in battles of wits, learning to use thoughts and words with precision and richness. In this sense, any encyclopedia worthy of reading will always be

the project of many. But unlike Diderot, I see no reason why one individual cannot choose to bring the results of this process together on paper for his own purposes, making a record of what she has drawn from these “circles of learning” to further her own projects and aspirations. In fact, if one has the arrogance and ambition, I would be surprised if he didn’t do something of this sort even if he calls it by a different name. Thus, it should surprise no one who knows me that I am taking up such a project.

I have made several references to Diderot and his encyclopedia, because these were among the main inspirations for this project¹. Although Diderot emphasizes the collective nature of such a project and describes its purpose as the gathering together of supposedly objective knowledge, many of his own entries in the encyclopedia he helped to edit stand out precisely because he goes beyond these limits. He uses humor and sarcasm to take his own entries beyond the realm of mere rote expression of what is supposedly known to a real critical interaction with the subject matter that expresses his own ideas, his personal confrontation with the world around him. This is what I intend to accomplish here. If learning is not merely about gathering bits of knowledge to spew forth as trivia, but is rather about developing the tools for critically interacting with the world, then it is an intense and playful battle of wits in which critical thinking, humor, sarcasm and mockery combine to heighten our capacities to encounter a hostile world on our own terms.

In this sense, I intend this encyclopedia not to be a “chain” of gathered knowledge, but rather an intervention in the wide “circle of learning” that the development of anarchist theory and practice could be. So come, if you will, and take a walk with me. We might all learn something, and it should at least be fun.

Egoism

Since I call this specifically an egoist encyclopedia, a complete introduction to the project requires an explanation of what I mean by egoism. But before going into this explanation, I am going to summarily dispose of two misunderstandings of egoism that I have encountered – one that is utterly ridiculous, the other a bit more understandable (especially in light of the lack of modesty among egoists). First of all, egoism has nothing whatsoever to do with Freud or Freudianism!¹ In fact, the egoist theorist best known in both anarchist and

[1] Sadly, this is a real misunderstanding that I have encountered. Judging from the way it is expressed, I can say with some assurance that those who make this false connection are to a person (how do I say this nicely?... fuck it, I don’t) deluded feminist ideologues who find their ideological enemies everywhere, since that is the only way to assure themselves that they are right...

philosophical circles, Max Stirner, wrote his central work, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*², more than eleven years before Freud existed and died in the year of his birth. Unlike Freud, Stirner had no interest in dividing an abstract notion of the human mind into parts in order to map it out. Stirner's "Ich" (translated "I") often refers to himself and always to specific, concrete living individuals, whereas Freud's "Ich" (translated "ego"³) is merely one part of an allegedly three-part psyche. Hopefully, this is sufficient to dispense with such silliness...

Secondly, egoism is not the same thing as egotism. If some of us egoists consider ourselves to be among the most intelligent, most talented, wittiest and sexiest people existing on the planet today, this doesn't stem from our egoism, but from intensive self-analysis grounded in the cold, hard realism of our immodest dreams and boundless aspirations. And besides why would we succumb to the falsehoods of humility when, in this case, the truth serves our interests much better?

Having dealt with both the ridiculous and the sublime, I now want to begin meandering toward the heart of the matter: what is egoism?

Of course, the egoism I describe will be my egoism. Anything else would not really be egoism. But like all that is my own, I have taken my egoism from many different places, a few of great enough influence that they indicate a line of thought and a way of encountering the world that has developed historically and theoretically since at least the time of Stirner. So it is worthwhile to look at some of the basic ideas in this line of thought.

A distinction is sometimes made between descriptive egoism and prescriptive or ethical egoism. The former simply declares that human beings always act in what they perceive, on some level, as their own interests. This perspective makes no claims that this process is always conscious or that the decisions are based on real knowledge of what one's interests are; it only claims that there is always a factor of perceived self-interest in our decisions.⁴ Thus far, I don't really think that this perspective says much of interest; it's a banality that, though unassailable, is nonetheless inadequate in itself for fully explain-

[2] Which translates as *The Unique and Its Property*, but is unfortunately entitled *The Ego and Its Own* in the current English translation. A new translation is in the works.

[3] Neither Stirner nor Freud use the word "ego" in their works, but Stirner does refer to egoism and egoists.

[4] For example, the good christian is convinced that her willingness to give up immediate pleasures here on earth will help him build up "treasure in heaven" by pleasing god. Thus, though his perception of his own interests is delusional, she is nonetheless making her choice based on perceived self-interest.

ing religious, patriotic, maternal and similar sacrifices. Left atthis point, descriptive egoism leaves an essential question unanswered: what leads people to see their interests as something external to and greater than themselves?

Ethical egoism proclaims that if we were to consciously and willfully create our lives on our own terms, each of us would tend to live more fully and probably more enjoyably than we do when we let life happen to us. While most ethical egoists accept the basic premise of descriptive egoism, they also realize that most people live unconsciously most of the time. When people are unclear of their real interests, the latter become alienated, standardized and crystallized into values and ideals perceived as greater than any individual interest. In this form, these interests come to dominate the individual to whom they once belonged. But they don't dominate an individual as abstractions, but in the social, institutional forms into which they solidify: the state, private property, religion, the law, rights, etc. (as well as various petty obsessions that express the deformed interests behind these institutions on the level of our individual daily lives⁵). Thus, the decision to become consciously egoist, to begin the project of grasping one's life as one's own, is also a decision to rise up, to create one's life against the ruling institutions.

The reason *The Unique and Its Property* stands out as the central text of egoism is that it was the first, and perhaps still the best, book to develop an egoist critique in depth. It actually wrestles with the questions raised by descriptive egoism in a forceful way and in the process develops one of the strongest critiques of ideology. And in the process it develops an egoist method that goes beyond either “descriptive” or ethical egoism, a method that uses phenomenology and dialectics in both a critical and constructive way.⁶ Unfortunately, this has not prevented some people from misreading the book and developing doctrines from their misunderstandings that undermine the core of egoism.

One such doctrine that I have occasionally encountered in Stirner-influenced literature is that which sees the “unique one” as an essence to which we must aspire, thus turning it into another spook. This reading of Stirner misses one of his central points: that our uniqueness does not exist outside us as an essence, but within us and our relationships as our existence. Thus egoism, as Stirner understood it, is neither the petty economic self-interest that early political economists spoke about as a central impetus to social relationships, nor is it essentialist individualism. Rather it is an idea about how real individuals do and could interact with and in their worlds. I am going to try to clarify this – hopefully, like a clear, clean magnifying glass, and not like a mudball in your eye.

In recent years, it seems that the very existence of individuals, of “I’s” has come into question – at least in certain theoretical circles. I am not referring

here to the tiresome puritanical leftist litanies that condemn the so-called “individualism” of the most boringly conformist and standardized society to ever mar the face of the planet. These strident sermons, calling for yet more sacrifice, deserve no more response than our sneers of contempt. I am rather talking about the idea that the individual is merely a social fiction, since we are all merely products of the social reality that surrounds us. There are a number of fallacies in this. I will only briefly mention a few:

- 1) Those who make this argument will also generally argue that “race”, “gender” and similar categories don’t have an essential existence, but are rather merely social products. Nonetheless, they don’t consider these categories fictions, but rather social realities that have to be taken into account. Only ideological considerations can explain why the same recognition is not granted to the individual.
- 2) This way of thinking conflates the actual individual with the concept of the individual put forth in essentialist individualism – in other words it assumes that “individuality” means the existence of an essence in each of us that is separate from our relationships and other activities. There have been other, far more nuanced ways of thinking of the individual, among them those of Stirner.
- 3) This perspective forgets that society itself does not have a concrete existence of its own. It is merely a product of the activities of individuals interacting and relating in specific, generally standardized ways. In fact, it may be more accurate to say that “society” is verbal shorthand for describing the more standardized, formalized and institutionalized aspects of how we relate and interact, of how we create life together, particularly in their current, unconscious, habitual forms. In other words, this perspective is a classic example of reification, which turns the activity done into the actor, and the actor into the product. And like all examples of ideological reification, this one seems to be aimed at undermining the will to act in the world.

I have brought up this perspective because it helps me to clarify my own egoism. Each one of us is an utterly unique being, beyond description, beyond words. This does not mean that we share nothing with any other, but rather that even the way in which each of us encounters the shared thing is unique. This uniqueness does not stem from some individual essence – that would be metaphysics and imply the possibility that we might fail to live up to this essence. Thus, it would transform uniqueness into a power above us to which we must conform, and this would require the creation of a shared, value-laden language to describe what unique-ness was, destroying it as uniqueness. My uniqueness, your uniqueness, every individual’s uniqueness originates from the fact that the endless interweaving of relationships that go into creating each of us in every moment is unique to each of us. No one else could possibly

have precisely the same fluctuating patterns of acting, perceiving, consuming, transforming and relating as you or I going into the creation of who she is in each moment. This has a few implications. First of all, it undermines any concept of an essential self, since the relationships that make me unique in each moment change from moment to moment. This doesn't deny continuity, which is necessary for self-consciousness (and the ability to make decisions and act), but makes it clear that this continuity exists as a relationship with my previous uniquenesses, in other words as an action I take, a choice I make in how I interact with the world, not as an essence, a "soul". Secondly, it makes it clear that not all relationships are social in nature. In fact, I think that the term social relationship is best applied to those relationships that seek to standardize and institutionalize our interactions in order to minimize the effects and experience of the uniqueness that is the one thing we all share in common. Thirdly, it implies not only the possibility of becoming aware of our uniqueness, but also of choosing to become its conscious creator. This is the most important factor. Within the context of society as we know it, our uniqueness seems to be an accident that happens to us. We could describe society as a buffer to prevent the negative aspects of this apparent accident, as it encounters the same apparent accident in others, from causing too much damage (at least to the larger network of relationships). This buffering process takes the form of the imposition of standardization and institutionalization upon the broader relationships that exist. This creates a social system in which nobody actually gets what he desires, but rather everyone compromises to varying extents in order to minimize pain. Everything is measured; survival dominates over life. This is the petty world of the economy in which egoism is shrunk down to the atomized competition for material goods. This competition has the effect of hiding our uniqueness behind identities, the most important of which are worker and consumer (citizen runs a distant, but necessary, third).

But we are not all content with the dominance of survival over life. And there is only one way to overturn this way of "living". Each of us has to become the creator of her own uniqueness in each moment, making it her own. This is an ongoing activity that would continue even after the institutions that rule us have been destroyed. Since this uniqueness is an interweaving of relationships that is specific to each individual, it is necessary first of all for a person to take his past as his own, using it as a tool for understanding the possibilities of the present. Then she also needs to grasp and begin to create present relationships, learning to make affinity, complicity, mutuality and solidarity, as well as hostility, enmity, contempt and hatred into conscious choices reflecting the desire for the fullest, most intense and beautiful life, a desire that insists on creating itself in each moment. And if each of us, or even a substantial minority of us were to truly begin this process of creating our lives on our terms, it would upset the stability of standardization and institutionalization. It would be an insurrection against the ruling order.

When I speak of egoism, I mean precisely this desire to make my uniqueness, the relationships through which I come to be, my own in rebellion against the institutions that seek to standardize our relationships, to bury uniqueness under habit. Thus, I will always begin my analyses from this desire and meander with it down various paths through cities and gardens and jungles, exploring the possibilities for realizing this desire. And believe me, I'm egotistical enough to believe that I can realize this insurgent egoist dream here and now, in every moment.

Anarchism, Anarchy

As an egoist, obviously, I have no desire to be ruled. And considering the obligations involved, I would also never want to rule. With this in mind, it should come as no surprise that I, like most egoists, am an anarchist. But what does this mean. What is anarchism? What is anarchy?

In recent years, there has been a trend in certain anarchist circles to reject the term “anarchism”. This stems from a kind of lazy, quasi-magical thinking that ascribes special powers to certain words or even syllables, so that their mere presence or absence can transform reality¹. Anarchism is automatically seen as an ideology simply because of the “ism” at the end. By replacing this “ism” with a “y”, far too many anarchists think that they have magically freed themselves from ideology. In fact, they have simply added to the trend of reducing and impoverishing language. I find both words – anarchism and

anarchy – far too useful to give up either one in the name of some “anti-ideology” ideology. Yet another (real) effort, my friends....

Etymologically, anarchism and anarchy come from a Greek word meaning “no ruler”. In their modern usage, this meaning is expanded to recognize that rule and authority have developed complex institutional forms which increase social control, and thus domination while at the same time lessening the power of any single individual to rule. So anarchism and anarchy now refer not just to the absence of a ruler, but to the absence of rule, of authority, as such.

For me, the word anarchism refers to the history and the theoretical and practical development of all of those who have consciously pursued the destruction of all rule and authority and the creation of a world in which all individuals are free to create their lives as they desire. The term is useful, because it points out that this pursuit has been conscious and has involved specific interrelationships and influences among those involved, which has led to a flowering of ideas and practices that can critically interact and sharpen our capacities for carrying on this pursuit.

[1] This sort of thinking is behind the linguistic puritanism of political correctness that has done so much to impoverish language in recent times.

It is possible to find ideas, events and movements throughout the history of rule that have opposed it. But before the 19th century, they tended to be far-flung in space and time without the means to easily bridge the gaps. This is why anarchism is usually traced back to the early 19th century when certain “socialists”² began to see the destruction of the state and all forms of authority as essential to the radical social transformation they desired and fought for.

One of the first people to call himself an anarchist was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and France was the source of some of the earliest anarchist revolutionaries and thinkers³. It was probably also where Bakunin first encountered anarchist ideas. The ideas quickly attracted the interest of rebels throughout and beyond Europe. Both Spain and Italy developed strong anarchist movements with a flourishing of ideas and practices in many directions.

And of course, I wouldn’t want to forget Max Stirner, whose book *The Ego and Its Own*⁴ was perhaps the first anti-authoritarian critique of ideology.

Though Stirner is not known to have ever called himself an anarchist, his rejection of the state, law, private and collective property, religion and every form of external and internal authority was to influence a wide spectrum of anarchists from Emma Goldman to Renzo Novatore, from Benjamin Tucker to the Bonnot Gang. But his real importance has been to guarantee that that there has always been at least a tiny amoralist, truly anti-ideological thread in the fabric of anarchist development, a gadfly to harass and when possible counteract the tendency to create anarchist moralities, anarchist rules, an anarchism of easy answers and guarantees.

It isn’t my intent here to go on with a detailed history of anarchism. But if we can recognize that the various trends within anarchist thought and practice today all reflect extensions of and responses to what anarchists have said and done in the past, we suddenly find that we have a whole theoretical arsenal at our disposal: critiques of civilization from Joseph Déjacque, Ernest Coeurderoy and Frank Brand (Enrico Arrigoni); critiques of organizationalism from Luigi Galleani and Giuseppe Ciancabilla; critiques of moralism from Renzo Novatore and Bruno Filippi; critiques of politics, industrialism, etc. The fact that these ideas have been developing within anarchists circles for so long

[2] At that time, socialism had a far broader meaning than it does now, referring to anyone who saw a need for a radical social transformation that would bring down bourgeois society and the institution of private property.

[3] For example, Joseph Déjacque and Ernest Coeurderoy, both of whom actually developed critiques of civilization (though not at all primitivist). Coeurderoy also influenced the situationists, particularly Vaneigem who wrote an introduction to an edition of Coeurderoy’s *Jours d’Exil* in the early 1970s.

[4] The original German title, *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum*, literally translates as “the unique one and his own/ownership/property/substance”

is not interesting because it gives those of us with similar ideas a heritage⁵, but because it offers us more tools, weapons and toys for developing our ideas and practices. Only an ideologue would give up such a treasure chest, free for the looting.

If anarchism refers to the history and theoretical and practical development of the conscious struggle to destroy all rule, anarchy describes a situation where there is no rule, where the accumulation of power does not exist, has broken down or has been destroyed. Anarchist practice aims to create anarchy on a global scale, but anarchy is also a method for our lives, our projects and our battles here and now. But what does this mean?

Anarchists want a world where all the institutions in which power is accumulated have been destroyed and all relationships of domination have disappeared. The very negativity of this desire is what opens the doors to an apparent infinity of possibilities for creating our lives. This is why the anarchist project must be essentially negative, one of destruction. To try instead to define it as a positive project, a program, is to set boundaries and transform anarchy itself into an institution to be built⁶. This bounded “anarchy” would be a mere abstraction. It would be a cause to serve, another form of domination. This is why “anarchist” programs are among the surest ways to undermine the practice of anarchy and transform anarchists into political activists aiming for an end, a final destination, for which each of us is simply a means.

But the only ends that it makes sense for any of us to pursue are our selves, our lives and our relationships, and these ends are never reached once and for all. They are created constantly as the ongoing process of living. Anarchy is the negative project through which we destroy the social limits that stand in the way of this process of constant self-creation. Thus, it is not a destination, but a practice with which to experiment immediately. The anarchist insistence upon concrete freedom manifests here and now is what Stirner called “ownness” – the process of making one’s life one’s own against all claims made against it. This inevitably brings us into conflict with this society and its endless series of obligations and duties, and the institutions, people, structures and technologies through which it reinforces these obligations and duties. So the negative project of anarchy is a project of active attack against all these institutions, people, structures and technologies.

[5] Heritages are of interest only to those who clasp to identities, and unique ones cannot be identified.

[6] This tendency to try to transform anarchy into a positive project is not limited to those who want to create mass organizations, platforms or federations. It is found wherever people begin to imagine a particular model as the way to live anarchically. Thus, when primitivism becomes more than a tool among many for developing a critique of civilization and is taken as a model, this too is an attempt to make anarchy a positive project, a program, setting boundaries on possibilities.

And it is precisely the negativity of anarchy that I, as an egoist, embrace. By aiming for the destruction of all the concrete institutional frameworks that uphold the rule of real authorities and of ideological spooks, anarchy opens the way to an infinite world of possibilities from which I can create my life.

God

“Everything that is doddering, squint-eyed, infamous, sullying and grotesque is contained for me in this single word: God.”

– André Breton

“If god existed, it would be necessary to abolish him.”

– Mikhael Bakunin

God is a spook that has been haunting the human race for thousands of years. That such a petty, tyrannical non-being continues to haunt the human world raises serious question about the intelligence of this so-called intelligent species. But the continuing belief in such a (non)being is not the primary concern for anarchists or egoists. The statement of Bakunin, that hairy-faced lover of the wicked passions, reflects the anarchist concern. If I reject authority, then I also reject god, since god represents the most absolute form of authority.

As Bakunin’s declaration suggests, anarchist atheism is not some tolerant, condescendingly compassionate atheism that treats religion with “understanding.” Rather it is a fierce, blasphemous, contemptuous atheism that aims to destroy every last vestige of the phantom of god wherever it raises its mangy, flea-bitten head. Just as the individual who chooses to create her life on her own terms will have no tolerance for kings or presidents, cops and judges, capitalists or commissars,¹ masters and overseers of any sort, so also he will have no tolerance for god or its worshipers....

It is obvious to me that god does not exist as an actual being in itself. If the old pagan gods existed, you and I would have encountered them in a concrete flesh-and-blood form – talking bulls, swans that seduce us or our lovers, petty superbeings using us as pawns in their silly conflicts, dangerous giants casting thunderbolts or turning boats on the open sea into grape arbors... You know the stories. Certainly these gods provide us with amusing tall tales that are generally more literary and erotic than the tales of superheroes in our comic books. In addition, despite their pettiness, bad tempers and capriciousness, they are much more likable – and believable – than the tyrannical bully of the three major monotheistic religions.

This fellow is also petty and temperamental. But beyond this, perhaps due

[1] Or subjects and citizens, snitches and rats, good workers and party-members – obedient slaves of any sort.

to his lack of any erotic outlet, he is also quite vicious and lacking in self-esteem. If, in the oldest of these three religions, he limited himself to attacking the enemies of his chosen people or punishing these chosen ones for infidelity, in christianity and islam, he goes so far as to threaten those who don't believe in him with eternal torture. Obviously, he doesn't have any real faith in himself, or he wouldn't have such a desperate need for others to worship him, so if he wanted to be consistent, he would have to send himself into those eternal flames as well. This lack of confidence may also explain why this sorry excuse for a supreme being feels the need to meddle in the personal affairs of human beings – a supposedly intelligent² “species” (actually a large number of individuals of varying intelligence) on what this “supreme being” would have to perceive as an insignificant planet orbiting a minor star on the outskirts of one among innumerable galaxies – despite the claim that he also supposedly created and maintains a universe that appears to be infinite (or nearly so) to the individuals who make up this “species” of interest. This pathetic tyrant is a patent absurdity.

Unfortunately, though, there are ways in which god does exist. First of all, god exists as a phantom haunting the minds of believers. In this form, the spook produces guilt, shame, a myriad of irrational fears, crippling repression, and as a consequence of all this, an often vicious tendency to seek out “sin” in others in order to cast judgment upon them. This is god.

As a consequence of this mental haunting, the divine spook also haunts human beings socially, and this haunting affects non-believers as well as believers. It has manifested in religious wars, inquisitions, clitorectomies, blue laws, abortion clinic bombings, sharia, the special degradation of women,³ and so on and so on. This too is god.

A careful look at its social consequences show how this spook tends to repress rebelliousness, promote obedience and uphold authority. There are reasons why certain powerful people invented this concept and why every state, even those that are allegedly atheist,⁴ maintain it in some form.

Now I have heard the addle-brained new age arguments (if you can call them that) which try to separate god from its religious origins: “Well, don't you think that there must be some power that created all this and holds it together? Wouldn't that be god?” If some objective reality exists, I have no

[2] See comments above.

[3] Beyond the general degradation of all individuals intrinsic in the concept of god.

[4] The Bolsheviks, for example, had their “Godmakers” who invented rituals, icons and so on to appeal to the religiosity of the Russian people. The “Godmakers” were the ones behind Lenin's tomb, where the Great Leader's corpse appeared to lie eternally without rotting.

knowledge of it, and would see no need for it to have a creator or maintainer. Why add a further inexplicable layer to what is already inexplicable? And assuming for a moment that an objective reality exists with the vastness of what you and I call the universe, and that it requires a power to create and maintain it, that power would be too abstract and distant to qualify as a god in any humanly meaningful sense.

Those who developed the concept of god did so because of the effects it could have on individuals and on social relationships. Its use for explaining the alleged reality of the universe was, at best, a byproduct of its psychological and social utility – an aspect of the self-alienation and social alienation of creativity from individuals and the relationships they build. God's utility lies in it being conceived as a personal being who loves and hates, rewards, punishes and avenges. The abstract power put forward in these new age arguments is far too impersonal and remote to fulfill this essential aspect of the concept of god. It can provide no real comfort and provoke no real fear. And so it fails as a god.

But above all, it is utterly unnecessary. Objective reality is itself nothing more than a conception. No individual ever actually experiences it. I experience only the world that I perceive. (This is almost a tautology, yet it seems like someone needs to say it over and over again). In an important sense, this means the world I experience is one I create⁵ and with this the problem of the creator disappears. But I experience my world as one of interactions and relationships, many of them with others who seem to be creating their worlds in ways that interweave with mine and affect it. To say that this creates an objective reality is to make a huge – and absurd – metaphysical leap. I instead find it useful to think of this in terms of an interindividual actuality. That is to say, an interweaving of individual worlds that in coming together and separating act upon each other. For this, there is no need of a god. I am a creator of worlds and universes alongside other such creators. For myself, in my worlds, I am the supreme being. And therefore I laugh at all gods.

[5] Not in that annoying new age sense where I end up being to blame for all my own suffering, but in the sense that I perceive by interpreting what comes in through my senses, and without this interpretation on my part, I would perceive nothing, I would experience nothing, I would have no world, and for all practical intents and purposes I would not exist.

Realism

“An extremely basic observation imposes itself nothing is as useless as the real”

- Georges Henein

Let's get one thing out of the way immediately: realism is an ideology. In every authoritarian society it has been one of the ideological tools of the rulers. In the present society, it is one of their most important tools for molding social consensus, on par with the democratic ideology. So it is never surprising when those who hold power or those who willingly accept their own servitude tell us to “be realistic”. After all, indomitable and challenging ideas, wild and creative desires, and intoxicating and playful dreams are a threat to the stability of their world, a threat that they don't care to face.

But what is the ideology of realism? It is the ideology that declares that reality as we know it is inevitable. And let's be clear right away, when the adherents of realism speak of the inevitable, they are not just talking about obvious material realities, such as the fact that human beings can't eat granite or hike from New York City to Lisbon across the bottom of the Atlantic. They wouldn't even waste their time telling anyone they encountered attempting such things to “be realistic”; they'd just send them off to some mind-quack or lock them up in a loony bin. No, the reality that they declare to be inevitable is the social, political and economic reality that surrounds us. Starting from this presumed inevitability (which in our times is usually considered as a contextual or historical inevitability), they dismiss any refusal to accept the impositions of the existing reality and to mold one's life and activities to its requirements as dogmatic purism or even mad delusion. For the realist, there is only one way to face reality, and that is to accept it.

The ideological power of realism stems from the fact that reality really cannot simply be ignored. Those who try to do so eventually find it slapping them hard in the face. But those who accept the one way of facing reality that realism allows will be obliged to conform to its demands and obey the dictates of the existing world. This is why the masters of this world love to promote realism, and their willing slaves embrace it. This is also why I am always a bit taken aback when certain anarchists start to tell me to “be realistic”.

I would like to think that the anarchists who say this mean something different from the masters and their willing slaves. After all, I am quite familiar with the slogan from May 1968 in France: “Be realistic, demand the impossible!” But nothing I have heard from present-day “realistic” anarchists has shown any evidence of an interest in the sort of explosive expansion of the real beyond all its social boundaries that this slogan implied. Quite the opposite. The realism that these anarchists are calling for is a reining in of ideas

and actions, dreams and desires in the face of imposed realities. So this realism is basically the same as the realism of the masters and willing slaves of this world.

To understand what might draw some anarchists to accept, even if only temporarily, this ruling ideology that is so contrary to any form of rebellion, it is necessary to recognize that far too many anarchists are soft-hearted, soft-headed humanitarians, animalists or environmentalists. They tend to mistake charity for solidarity (something that I hope to deal with in future Encyclopedia entries). In other words, they are altruists. Their altruism is the key to how realism tames them.

When anarchists call for realism, it is almost always in the face of a perceived situation of urgency—sometimes of “moral urgency” like experimentation on animals, sometimes ongoing emergencies like environmental devastation, sometimes more immediate emergencies like the current economic catastrophe or specific incidences of state repression. Combined with the altruism of so many anarchists, this sense of urgency leads to the feeling that one has to do “whatever is necessary” to alleviate the immediate situation. The basic argument is that since there isn’t going to be a revolution any time soon, we have to deal with these urgent situations within the context of the current social reality. How far specific anarchist realists are willing to go in this conformity to the present social and political reality varies. I have heard self-proclaimed anarchists use it to justify petitioning the government, writing letters to various authorities to affect their decisions, litigating, promoting legislation, voting and so on. One anarchist I knew even tried to justify Paul Watson’s (the captain of the Sea Shepherd) work with certain police forces in South American against marine poachers in the name of the urgent need to protect endangered marine animals. So this sense of urgency combines with altruism to make these “realistic” anarchists willing to sacrifice themselves to... the existing social order. Any fierce and challenging ideas, any wild, utopian desires, any intoxicating, playful dreams are suppressed in the name of being realistic. A stark and unimaginative morality of altruistic pragmatism replaces the resolute, egoistic amorality of anarchic revolt.

So the basic premise of realism doesn’t change when anarchists embrace it. Anarchist realists also make their choices based on the assumption that there is only one way to face reality and that is to accept it. But to the extent that one accepts a reality based on domination, exploitation, authority, hierarchy, representation... one is not an anarchist. The anarchist realist is caught in an inescapable contradiction.

But, contrary to the claims of the ideologues of realism, there is another way to face reality: as its implacable enemy. I have my ideas, my dreams, my desires. They are certainly not realistic, but they are my own. To give them

up would be to give myself up, and I am not going to do that. This opposition is precisely what puts me at odds with the existing world. And this conflict is inevitable, because I choose to make it so by my refusal to surrender. Thus, I grasp my ideas, my dreams, my desires as weapons to use against this world, and the only urgency I recognize is that of my own desire to be the free creator of my life. So I will face reality with weapons in hand, aiming to destroy it... to destroy the unconscious social consensus, the endless conformity and obedience that create the present reality. Because I want to begin immediately to shape my life and my world on my own terms, in relation, interaction and sometimes conflict with other lives and other worlds that refuse to bow to the demand to be realistic. And this can only be done in unrelenting conflict with the reality that rules now.

Writer's Block

As we all know, good writers are never at a loss for words. No matter what the circumstance, what their mood, what the topic, they always know what to say. Their words flow like wine at a bacchanal...

BULLSHIT!!!

As an anarchist and an egoist, of course, I reject any specialization, any attempt to create an identity for me out of the various things I do. Thus, I am only a writer in the same sense that I am a walker, a sleeper, an eater, a traveler... well, you get the picture.

Within the course of living my life, there is no single activity that I can do endlessly, no single activity that flows continuously. Even the pouring of fine ales down my gullet has to stop at times – the very enjoyment of inebriation requires this (as does the immediate and long term needs of my body). And writing is an activity that requires a wee bit more skill and effort than savoring intoxicating beverages.

Writing itself comes in many forms. Anyone who is the least bit literate necessarily does a bit of writing, and those of us who get some pleasure from the activity use it to play many games.

It should surprise no one who is reading this that I write first and foremost for myself. In writing, I can clarify my ideas, express certain dreams and passions, communicate with specific individuals or with a larger group of anonymous readers with the possibility of creating new projects or discovering new accomplices. I have even been able to write erotic fantasies that have aroused me to the point that I couldn't finish writing them because other urges called me (perhaps someday I will publish a booklet of unfinished erotic tales...). But the very act of writing implies a desire to communicate

with another – even if that other is simply your future self.

But of all the various ways of writing, the most difficult, I think, is writing for anonymous readers. You are writing because there is something you want to communicate, something specific that you want to express to these unknown others, these individuals that you know nothing about. There is no way of knowing how they will actually read your words. And if you also have no interest in evoking belief, in gathering a group of acolytes who turn your living ideas into dead dogmas, this means finding a balance between precision and fluidity, incisiveness and openness to new possibilities. And that balance can quite difficult to attain, let alone maintain. It is most readily achieved at those times when your life and your ideas correspond most closely, creating a flow between thought and activity, theory and practice, that gives them a dynamic unity.

But the realities of the current world (as well as those of the body) can often impose themselves, weakening or severing this link. Perhaps economic realities storm into your , mocking your desire to destroy the economy. Perhaps the state intrudes. Perhaps sickness saps your energy. And perhaps it is nothing external or physical imposing itself, but just other needs, desires and impulses taking priority. Whatever the case, the written flow to anonymous others is dammed.

In itself, this is no disaster for an egoist like me. Of course, my life, my needs, my desires take priority for me. How could it be otherwise? What I put out in writing is always a gift, not an obligation (even if it is supposed to be a regular column in a magazine, like this). And I will do it on my terms (working it out, of course, with any collaborators). But I am a clever fellow, and when “writer’s block” hits, and my greatest efforts just can’t make my brilliant wit and biting sarcasm, my depth of thought and peaks of coherence flow out onto paper, perhaps I can still come up with something light and slightly silly. Something like this.

Society

About twenty years ago, I came upon an essay in the publication Demolition Derby called “What Is Society”. A good piece of theoretical writing, it raised a number of interesting questions that inspired some of my own explorations. But there was one major problem with the essay, a problem that also plagued some of my explorations into similar questions for several years. The writers of the essay missed a central point: there is no such thing as society.

Such a statement may seem absurd, but I would challenge anyone to show me that thing which is society. They’ll fail. It’s not there. Someone will tell

me that there are many things that can't be seen but are still there. Take the wind for example. I can tell it's there by its effects. I can see, hear, smell or feel those effects. You may tell me that the same applies to society. But every effect that you might attribute to society, I can show to be caused by specific activities of specific individuals in specific situations (is that specific enough for you?). It is the specific nature of these interactions, activities and situations that make the word, society, useful.

Consider, for example, a very common type of interaction that many of us go through frequently. I'll describe it in the first person. After wandering among aisles of shelves with a myriad of objects on them. I take certain of these objects and put them in a basket I am carrying. I then get into a line of people slowly moving past a counter. When I get to the counter I take the things out of my basket and place them on the counter behind which another person is standing. Perhaps I greet this person with a "How are you" and they respond "Fine, thank you" or something of the sort. They scan the items I set before them so that a computer registers a price on the cash register. When they have done this to all the items, they tell me, "That will be \$__". I take some paper printed with that value (or more) out of my wallet and hand it to them. They put it in the cash register, put my items in a bag and say, "Thank you. Have a nice day." Perhaps I respond in kind. It is a habitual, ritualistic interaction, and it is merely a small part of a tight and formalized network of interactions and activities that involves the production of the items, their transportation to the store where I find them, the production of the money I use, the method by which I get the money, etc., etc. Every one of these activities and interactions is carried out by individuals in relationship with other individuals. But the complex interweaving of these interactions and activities and the way in which they are formalized into roles and institutional frameworks make them alien to us. When I am walking through the aisles of that store or paying at that counter very little of my self is there. So even though these activities involve ways of associating, the alienated nature of these associations makes it easy to see them as something outside of our activity, as something that acts on its own. Society is the useful fiction, the shorthand, by which we can refer to this network of institutionalized and alienated relationships. But it is essential to remember that it is a fiction.

In my opinion, society is not a particularly clear term. As a fiction, it seems to be more useful in hiding than in revealing the nature of the habitual and institutional relationships we go through every day. The term, social order, is much clearer in that it has the implication that the associations between individuals are ordered into roles, identities, various categorizations so as to guarantee the reproduction of the order. But even this ordering, though reinforced by such institutions as government, law, police, armies, economic institutions, etc., occurs through the activities each of us carries out habitually,

unthinkingly, because “that’s the way it is”.

But more to the point, from my egoist perspective, is to examine what this means in terms of the project of overturning the present social reality. Anarchists may talk about transforming society or destroying it. But since society is merely the fiction we use as a shorthand for the network of interwoven activities and interactions that have been institutionalized into our daily lives, the transformation is that of how individuals relate with each other. For me, it means experimenting with fluid associations in which the individuals involved refuse institutionalization and formalization. The destruction would be that of the institutional structures that formalize and alienate our associations and, thus, our lives. This points to the potential for a subversive practice that can be carried out in the daily life of any individual who wants to escape these structures. It involves an active refusal to conform and a willingness to attack the habitual and institutional structures of the relationships we live every day. This practice itself requires experimenting with a fluidity in the way an individual fights against society and creates her own life, a capacity to move freely, to dance lightly about, to hide, to fade, to reappear again from nowhere. This same fluidity is the basis for free association. It forms a practice in which the destruction of the fiction of society and the institutional framework that is its reality is the creation of a new way of living that cannot be pinned down.

Boundaries

In recent years, I’ve heard a lot of anarchists talking about the need for boundaries. It’s really pretty tiresome: “Abolish all borders, but don’t you dare challenge my sacred boundaries!” I was attracted to godless anarchy those many years ago, not just because it was so sexy, but also because it challenged boundaries of every sort. Freedom for me is the endless expansion of myself and my possibilities. And such expansion requires this challenge.

And you really don’t need boundaries. All of us already have them in abundance. They seem to be a part of existing in the world. So the question worth asking is: how do you views these boundaries?

Those who say we all need boundaries seem to see them as strict borders between themselves and the outside world, borders that they need to defend and that others need to respect. This idea of respecting other people’s boundaries is a bit odd in itself. Maybe the little people of this pathetic society no longer perceive themselves as worthy of each others’ respect (and they might be right), so instead they come up with this abstract and rigid concept of boundaries, sacred barriers that you and I are to respect. Such boundaries are walls for you to hide behind. That might be fun in a snowball fight, but

as a way to live your life from day to day?... These boundaries are limits an individual puts on her own free activity, ways of policing himself and others, because she is afraid, because he that he is too weak for certain encounters and that she and others should accept weakness rather than challenging it and seeking to overcome it. Boundaries of this sort are the very opposite of the stiffening of oneself against another that Stirner talked about. This stiffening has nothing to do with an abstract boundary that I expect others to respect. Rather it is the assertion of my strength and confidence in a specific situation of conflict. Boundaries, conceived as strict borders that people are to defend and respect, are ways of avoiding such conflict, ways of cowering back from the real, practical meaning of freedom as self-ownership and self-creation.

But there is another way to conceive of boundaries. This is an organic way, in which boundaries are the places of encounter, where the individual meets her world. When she hides within these boundaries, treating them as protective walls, he loses touch with his world and so also with all the things and beings through which she can create herself. And so he becomes rigid, stuck, incapable of growth and expansion, trapped in a straightjacket of his own making. This is because the boundaries have been reified; they have ceased to be meeting points for interaction and have instead become fortress walls blocking interaction.

So challenging boundaries—especially those to which you or I feel most attached—is still central to the anarchist project. That project is still one of going out and confronting the world, facing and overcoming your limits, breaking down the walls that keep you in your place. Only in this way can an individual take the world into herself and expand herself in a process of endless self-creation and self-consumption. This process is an endless overcoming of boundaries, an endless stretching beyond. Here and now, we have to break down the walls formed by the institutions: the state, the economy, religion, law, ideology, technology, etc. But even after these are gone (should that day ever come), every individual who desires the fullness of his freedom as his own being will have to continue challenging her own boundaries (and welcoming the challenge from others). Boundaries will always be there, and so the challenge must always be there as well. This is the practice of freedom, because it is the practice of being one's own.

The Unique: A Manifesto

I find them strange, the strivers after “species being” – acid-addled hippie one-ness mystics or smart-assed ultra-left commies – They don’t see that “species being” is the capitalist, which is to say the social, goal...

Overcoming capitalism is overcoming “species being,” and this is the play of

the unique.

The unique has gone beyond her meaningless humanity, the banalities she shares with every human being, to create his own life, his own world, for herself...

This is authenticity – to actively author one's own life. The unique lives without guilt, morals, excuses, apologies, humanity, identity, past, future.

The unique knows no regret for what he has not done, because he always takes every risk he can. She knows no guilt or shame for what she has done, because she does it all intentionally.

He willfully creates every interaction – with intention – the only reason: to increase the enjoyment and fullness of his life.

To some, the unique appears to be an anarchist, because she defies authority in all its forms whenever it gets in her way.

To others, he appears to be an elitist, because he refuses to keep herself down to compensate for the weakness or stupidity of others or due to liberal, moralistic demands for mediocre equality.

The rebellion of the unique is a rebellion of squandering, of taking for oneself the full enjoyment of life in all its aspects - including the enjoyment of others' enjoyment.

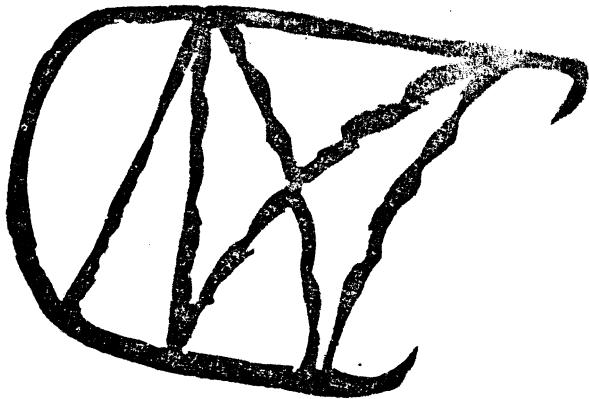
It is not a rebellion of sacrifice, for the unique will give up nothing for any cause...

Nor is it a rebellion of resentment – The unique never demands that anyone pull herself down to the lowest common denominator of humanity – Who wants the communal, democratic “self-management” of misery and mediocrity when he could experience the intensity and passion of the loves and hates, the unions and conflicts of unique beings creating their desire?

The unique is motivated by a “will to power” – a will to exercise the power of perpetual self-creation for her own enjoyment. The social con-text parodies this will with the will to exercise the power of domination and manipulation – the will to control others' lives because one lacks the courage to create one's own. The unique knows that social domination is not a form of self-creation, but is merely enslavement to a social role.

The unique will not fall for any of the half-measures offered by society: financial “wealth” which is just another face of poverty; political “power” which is just another face of weakness; romantic “love” and sentimentality which are the pallid faces of passionless pre-made social interactions.

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